



HOUSE COMMITTEE ON  
**AGRICULTURE**  
REPUBLICANS

## ***H.R. 2606, SUSTAINS ACT***

### **Sponsoring USDA Sustainability Targets in Agriculture to Incentivize Natural Solutions**

**Sponsored by Rep. Glenn "GT" Thompson**

**SUMMARY:** The legislation provides an opportunity for the private sector to partner with USDA to engage farmers and ranchers in supporting conservation initiatives, including to expand land use practices to sequester carbon, improve wildlife habitat, protect sources of drinking water, and address other natural resource priorities. Key provisions include the ability for USDA to match private sector investments and for the contributor to work with USDA to decide which natural resource concerns they want to address.

**BACKGROUND:** The legislation seeks to address two issues: 1) demand for conservation programs far outweighs the funding available and, 2) it gives the private sector an opportunity to help meet their public climate change commitments by investing in proven, scientifically backed conservation programs offered by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

Total annual mandatory budget authority for conservation programs has grown from a total of \$3.9 billion in FY 2008 to over \$6.7 billion in FY 2019. The 2018 Farm Bill is arguably the greenest farm bill to date, however, the demands for conservation funding and technical assistance still outpaces the current resources. For example, in FY20 NRCS was only able to fund 28% of Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) contracts, leaving nearly 90,000 applications unfunded.

Corporations and small businesses want to market to their customers' desire to buy sustainably grown food and fiber. Many large corporations have made public commitments to lower their carbon footprint within their supply chain, but are struggling to find the best way to achieve those goals.

Private-sector partnerships with USDA will increase farmers conservation of natural resources and help meet commitments for agriculture sustainability.

### **Specifically, the SUSTAINS Act:**

- Authorizes the "Contributions for Private-Sector Partnership," a USDA account that allows for private sector donations.
- Incentivizes private funding by awarding sponsorship of targeted conservation initiatives, including expanded land use practices to sequester carbon, improve wildlife habitat, protect sources of drinking water, and address other natural resource priorities.
- Allows USDA to administer conservation initiatives with current scientific practice standards, proven conservation programs and practices, and trusting relationships with farmers.
- Authorizes funds for USDA to match certain donations.

